

Jobcentres steer teens away from traineeships

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Jobcentre Plus (JCP) advisers have been told not to direct 18 and 19-year-olds to the government's flagship traineeship scheme because it would put their benefits at risk, *FE Week* has learned.

Documents seen by *FE Week* show staff in a number of JCPs are being instructed to ignore the work experience and employability programme — even though the rule affecting benefits is due to be by-passed.

In the Autumn Statement, Chancellor George Osborne promised trainees would be exempt from the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) rule preventing anyone working or training for more than 16 hours a-week claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA).

However, there has been no further announcement, although *FE Week* understands the exemption could be in place within a month.

In the meantime, an email sent to advisers and managers in one JCP from regional managers said: "Following conversations this week with the DWP, they have said they are currently not promoting traineeships to 18 and 19-year-old JCP customers who are in receipt of JSA. This is because... this group of people would lose their entitlement to benefits."

Kevin Ayton, managing director of provider KSA Training and Development Ltd, told *FE Week* that traineeship referrals from JCPs had "dried up by 100 per cent". He said: "We're struggling at the moment because the JCPs are bulging at the seams with people who would be ideal for a traineeship but aren't being offered them." He added that it didn't seem to be limited to 18 and 19-year-olds.

"The JCP take on this seems to be a blanket rule until clarification [on the 16-hour rule exemption] from DWP is received," said Mr Ayton. "A 21-year-old learner who had seen our flier attempted to enrol on our programme but was told by JCP to not do that as her

benefits would be in jeopardy."

Two further JCPs have confirmed that they were following similar 'ignore traineeships' guidance.

The email saying not to promote the programme went on to say DWP had raised the JSA issue with the Treasury and was hopeful it would be resolved "quickly".

It added: "In the interim the advice to advisers and providers is to ensure that any 18 or 19-year-old's benefit entitlement is checked with their local JCP office prior to starting a traineeship."

Since the traineeship programme, aimed at 16 to 24-year-olds, was introduced in September, it has suffered with lower than expected uptake and this latest development will do nothing to ease concerns.

A DWP spokesperson said traineeships were "an important part of the government's long-term plan to create a stronger, more secure economy".

He added: "Traineeships have the flexibility for providers to design them so jobseekers can participate without it affecting their benefits."

He said where traineeships offered more than 16 hours a week "it is appropriate that Jobcentre Plus advisers make claimants aware of this and for the provider to consider reviewing the design of the programme."

However, last month, Andrea Webb, director of traineeship provider Profile Development and Training, told *FE Week* that designing traineeships around the 16-hour rule was "limiting" and prevented them offering "a meaningful experience".

Meanwhile, the Association for Employment and Learning Providers (ALEP) had, according to director of employment and skills Paul Warner, "a very productive meeting" met with DWP officials.

He added: "The signs are hopeful that the proposed change with regards to the 16-hour rule as applied to the study element of traineeships will take place shortly."

See editor's comment on Page 6



FE figures on BBC Question Time



Professor Alison Wolf on BBC Question Time. Inset: host David Dimbleby with Skills Minister Matthew Hancock

Professor Alison Wolf and Skills Minister Matthew Hancock locked horns in debate as they appeared on BBC Question Time from Gillingham's MidKent College.

The show was filmed and aired on Thursday, February 6, with host David Dimbleby chairing a panel that also included former Labour cabinet minister Tessa Jowell, Respect MP George Galloway and historian David Starkey. See page 3

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-  **@NicolaCodd**
Enjoying first speakers from #157, #LEP and #ofsted @NCFE #upskillingthenation conference
-  **@BromleyAdultEd**
3 interesting speakers so far, discussing #upskillingthenation at Policy Conference
-  **@NCFE**
Key quote from @Ofsted_MCoffey - Ofsted doesn't punish innovation, it seeks it out and celebrates it
-  **@agladheight**
@matthancockmp says he sees me as his political godfather. I think of myself more like The film "John Hayes @NCFE #upskillingthenation"

For more see Page 6

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Still no end in sight to SFA software nightmare

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There remains no end in sight to the problems faced by providers trying to use new funding software to calculate how much government cash they are due.

Skills Funding Agency (SFA) deputy director for programme delivery and performance Rich Williams and deputy director for funding systems Una Bennett (pictured) spoke in a webinar hosted exclusively by FE Week publisher Lsect, presented by FE funding consultant Nick Linford. They spoke about ongoing issues with the new Funding Information System (Fis) software.

It should have been available in August last year, but was not released until November — and providers say it is still giving unreliable funding data reports.

Mr Williams admitted Fis was still creating inaccurate data and could not say when the issues would be resolved.

He said: "I cannot say we have fixes for every one of the [25] known issues for FIS but we are working very hard on that."

A spreadsheet on the Data Service's website has listed more than 70 problems with Fis.

A report issued this week by the SFA also conceded Fis was producing inaccurate data in five out of 12 key reporting areas.

The government's Learning Aim Reference System (Lars) online search engine should also have been available by last August.

It is supposed to help providers' management information system (MIS)



officers check whether qualifications are eligible for funding, and how much per learner providers should receive.

However, it is still not available and providers are having to use Lars Lite instead — a temporary downloadable database from the SFA that providers claim is also producing unreliable data.

When asked when Lars will be released, Mr Williams said: "Any date I give I would be making up, so I'm not going to give you a date."

When asked if development of Lars had been paused while the other funding software issues were being resolved, he added: "The focus has been elsewhere, absolutely."

Many in the sector have claimed the problems with Fis and Lars Lite corrupted key information in the Statistical First Release published on January 30.

A note in the report itself stated: "There is evidence of increased data lag for the first three months of 2013/14 compared to the same period of the previous year."

Boss speaks out over payments 'dispute'

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The managing director of a London-based independent learning provider has defended his firm after details of an alleged subcontractor payment dispute emerged.

James Clements Smith, of Prevista Ltd, a lead provider allocated £3.8m by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) this academic year, confirmed there was an issue, but claimed to have paid all subcontractors "in line with conditions".

It comes after several of its subcontractors wrote to other companies with a warning about alleged payment problems, and the SFA confirmed it had received "correspondence" about the issue.

But Mr Clements Smith told FE Week: "The company has paid all sub contractors and partners in line with negotiated and agreed service level agreements [SLAs], in line with funder requirements and in line with our audit practices. All legitimate outcome payments have been passed to our supply chain."

"I understand there is a letter circulating from a group of suppliers. All of whom have under-delivered to beneficiaries and on their SLA agreements with Prevista by some considerable margin."

"The dispute, if there is one, is with these

suppliers who are all subject to audit and compliance issues related to their delivery across government funded programmes.

"Audit and compliance is underway across all of our funded programmes and as part of our annual audit cycle. Any dispute which may arise will be subject to legal proceedings."

"Prevista has a strong balance sheet, has been in the market for close to 20 years, has a strong cash balance and has firm contract value for the foreseeable future across a range of funding streams."

Nine providers held SFA contracts, totalling £1.87m, through Prevista at the start of 2013/14, but other organisations outside the SFA's remit also subcontract for the organisation.

Among Prevista's current SFA subcontractors were Westminster Kingsway College and EXG Ltd.

The college has a £166,860 contract with the organisation, and confirmed an issue with payments had arisen, but would not go into detail.

A college spokesperson said: "We can confirm that the college has worked in partnership with Prevista and we are in discussions with them regarding some payments."

And EXG Ltd, which had a £106,693 contract with Prevista at the beginning of the 2013/14 year, confirmed it ended its working relationship with the firm "earlier than planned", but

FE Week news in brief

Edge survey findings

One-in-seven vocational learners was told by their school that they would make more money by going to university, research commissioned by the Edge Foundation has suggested.

It was one of the key findings from a survey of more than 2,000 18 to 35-year-olds, split between vocational and academic learners.

Another finding was that 65 per cent of the academic group felt their school supported their choice, while just 35 per cent of the vocational group said the same.

New teachers award

The Institute for Learning has announced a new award to recognise the efforts of recently-qualified FE teachers.

It has been launched to tie in with the seventh annual national Vocational Qualification (VQ) Day, on June 4.

Nominations have opened for the VQ newly-qualified FE teacher of the year award, which will be presented at an awards ceremony in London on June 3.

Visit www.vqday.org.uk/vq-awards to download an application form. The closing date is May 2.

MPs' literacy inquiry

Further education leaders are set to give MPs the first round of evidence in a new adult literacy and numeracy inquiry.

The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee session takes place on Tuesday, February 11, at Westminster from 9.30am.

Among those giving evidence will be David Hughes, chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Judith Norrington, a director at City & Guilds, and Tom Wilson, director, Unionlearn, TUC.

Prevista

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would not say why.

It comes after Prevista was rated as grade four, inadequate, in all areas following an Ofsted inspection last June.

The report said that the proportion of learners successfully achieving their qualifications was too low, and that planning and delivery of teaching, learning and assessment did not "provide an effective learning experience".

The report added there was not enough focus on learners achieving functional skills qualifications, which was undermining success rates for apprentices.

But Mr Clements Smith insisted improvements were being made and claimed Ofsted had since revisited.

An SFA spokesperson said: "The chief executive of the SFA holds a contract with Prevista as the lead provider."

"It is not appropriate for us to get involved in any contractual disputes between a lead provider and subcontractors."

"We have received correspondence on this matter and have passed on the concerns raised to Prevista."

Gove attacked over excellent ‘extra-curricular’ claims

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Funding for “expensive and untested” free schools should be used to improve extra-curricular activities at existing institutions, Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA) deputy chief executive James Kewin has said.

His comments follow a speech by Education Secretary Michael Gove at the London Academy of Excellence on Monday, February 3, in which he said he had “never visited a school that excelled academically, which didn’t also excel in extra-curricular activities”.

Mr Kewin hit out over the comments, saying the Department for Education had cut funding for extra-curricular activities by 10 per cent in 2011 and made further reductions which could see some sixth form colleges lose a third of their funding by 2015.

Mr Kewin said a recent £62m investment in nine new free schools for 16 to 19-year-olds would be better spent on existing sixth form colleges.

He said: “Mr Gove gave us no indication of how state sixth form colleges are supposed to provide the sort of extra-curricular activities available in the independent sector with just a third of the funding.

“Some of the funding required for these activities could be found if the government stopped lavishing funding on new, more



Further education figures were left disappointed by a lack of sector talk as Skills Minister Matthew Hancock and Professor Alison Wolf both appeared on BBC Question Time.

Professor Wolf, whose government-commissioned review of vocational education for 14 to 19-year-olds was published in early 2011, and Mr Hancock answered a broad range of questions — but nothing was raised about the FE and skills sector.

They were quizzed about anonymity in rape cases in light of the acquittal of Coronation Street actor William Roache and whether workers in essential services should have the right to strike, among other issues.

Sue McLeod, principal of MidKent College, where the show was filmed, was one such disappointed viewer, tweeting that the show was “feisty but lacking in #FE relevance”.

expensive and untested free school sixth form colleges while existing sixth form colleges are being forced to cut courses and reduce the support they can offer to students.”

Ian MacNaughton, principal of Sixth Form College Colchester, said: “In December 2012, Michael Gove said government funding cuts had happened by accident and not by design. “We have had no sense of rectification,

but rather a further deterioration with the funding cuts for 18-year-olds.

“How can they possibly expect the same level of education when resources across the sector are so different?”

Principal ‘devastated’ by girl’s nursery death

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The principal of a Yorkshire college said she had been “devastated” by the death of a three-year-old girl who got her neck caught in a rope at the college nursery in September 2012.

York College was found guilty of health and safety breaches over the death of Lydia Bishop, who became entangled while going down a slide on her first day at the nursery.

Alison Birkinshaw, York College principal, said: “This has been an extremely difficult period for all involved and we remain devastated by the awful events of September 17, 2012.

“We deeply regret what happened and can’t begin to imagine the pain experienced by Lydia’s family and everyone affected by this terrible tragedy. They remain constantly in our thoughts.”

A Leeds Crown Court jury heard Lydia lay unnoticed for 20 minutes before any attempt to revive her.

They heard safety measures to stop children using ropes alone or going unsupervised to a slide had not been enforced.

It emerged that the rope that had been left tied to the slide against health and safety policy.

The college was found guilty of failing to ensure the safety of babies, toddlers and pre-

school children at its nursery between August 1 and September 18, 2012.

“The governing body and all at York College fully respect the legal judgements made in this case and remain committed to learning from this tragedy,” said Dr Birkinshaw.

“The college took the decision to close the nursery immediately after the tragedy, and it will not reopen.”

Nursery worker Sophee Redhead, aged 25, from York, was cleared of the charges against her at the end of the three-week trial. She had been accused of manslaughter by gross negligence and faced an alternative charge of failing to ensure Lydia’s health and safety.

Detective Chief Inspector Nigel Costello, of North Yorkshire Police, said: “This was an extremely tragic case for all concerned, not least for Lydia’s family who have been left devastated by the loss of their daughter.

“It is only right that a full investigation into her death was conducted to provide her family with some answers and to establish if there was a criminal case to answer.

“Unfortunately, it has taken the death of a three-year-old girl to expose the flaws in their health and safety practices and I hope this case serves as a warning to other organisations that it isn’t enough to just have a procedure written down.”

Judge Mr Justice Coulson said the college would be sentenced on Friday, February 14.



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Euro funding could be better spent locally — DWP official

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European funding for tackling youth unemployment could have been better spent at local level, a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) official has admitted.

The head of the DWP European Social Fund (ESF) Division, Angus Gray, told a House of Lords inquiry into youth unemployment that too much of the fund had been spent centrally.

He pledged to ensure more control over the money was handed over to the bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

Mr Gray was appearing alongside Skills Minister Matthew Hancock and DWP Employment Minister Esther McVey as part of the inquiry by the Lords EU Sub-committee on the internal market, infrastructure and employment, led by Baroness O'Cathain (pictured).

Sub-committee member Baroness Valentine said: "We have received evidence from some witnesses that the use of EU funds in England is too centrally-directed and delivered and that this inhibits the development of effective local responses.

"While Leps should have a greater role in determining priorities for the next programming period, we have not been persuaded that the government's plans give sufficient powers to actors at the local level, particularly when it comes to delivery rather than planning."

Mr Gray said: "I think what I'd say is those criticisms are absolutely valid of the way we have run the programme to date.

"I always point out that all provision is local,

'Too much youth unemployment cash centrally-directed'

individuals are being helped in a city, or in a town, in a place and they are being helped to connect to the local labour market, but nonetheless it is true that the approach I and my predecessors have been managing over the last seven years has been more national than local.

"But we are changing that for the next programme, and I am testing the faith of people out there in whether they think I am making the change I am saying we are making."

Mr Hancock also re-assured the committee, adding: "The ESF money has now been devolved to LEPs. Maybe we can use that to demonstrate the strength of our intentions in this area.

"It is true that in many cases funding is demand-driven, i.e. when you get an apprenticeship, that triggers the government funding, rather than giving money to an intermediary to then spend in a particular area. In that sense, it is devolved right to the ground to the employer or to the individual who is doing the training."

The ESF supports Skills Funding Agency projects worth £874m and other schemes run by the DWP and National Offender Management Service totalling £354.6m.

It also gives an allocation of funding to regions — ranging from £2.8m (Gibraltar) to £403m (London).

The ESF spending across the European Union (EU) amounts to around 10 per cent (£62.4bn) of the EU's total budget. The aim of ESF spending is to support the creation of more and better jobs in the EU.



Clockwise from top left: Angus Gray, Esther McVey and Baroness O'Cathain.

Provider staff admit ripping off taxpayers

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The boss of A4e has spoken of his disappointment at four former employers after they admitted ripping off taxpayers while employed by the welfare-to-work provider.

Ex-A4e recruiters Julie Grimes, Aditi Singh, Bindia Dholiwar and Dean Lloyd, pleaded guilty to more than 30 charges of forgery and fraud when they appeared at Reading Crown Court (pictured) on Monday, February 3.

The case followed a police investigation into financial rewards claimed for helping the unemployed into work through the European Social Fund (ESF) 'Aspire to Inspire' Lone Parent mentoring programme, which ended in July 2011.

It is alleged that they forged documentation to support fraudulent claims for rewards for work with learners who had not found work or did not exist over a period of four years until February last year.

Grimes, 51, of Staines, admitted nine charges of forgery and Lloyd, 37, of Milton Keynes, admitted 13 offences of forgery.

Dholiwar, 27, of Slough, admitted seven counts of forgery while Singh, 30, of Slough, admitted two counts of forgery and one of fraud. No date was set for sentencing.

Andrew Dutton, A4e chief executive,



said: "I am deeply disappointed that a small number of people who formerly worked for A4e on the Aspire to Inspire contract in the Thames Valley up to 2011 clearly let down the people they were supposed to help, and in turn the taxpayer, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and A4e.

"A4e co-operated fully with the police enquiry, after our own internal investigation first brought these incidents to light.

"Since these events took place, we have augmented our controls and processes to seek to ensure that nothing like this could ever happen again.



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"This includes implementing all of the recommendations for improvement made to us by White & Case LLP following their independent review of our core processes.

"Furthermore, rigorous audits undertaken by the DWP and the Skills Funding Agency have concluded that there is no evidence of fraud on any of the contracts that we currently hold with them.

"A4e has, of course, committed to paying back in full the total value of unsubstantiated claims that were made to the Department for Work and Pensions as a result of the activities of these former employees.

"I would also like to say thank you to our 3,000 loyal, hard-working and principled staff who each day deliver public services to the highest standards that help to improve the lives of thousands of the most vulnerable in our society.

"I am intensely proud of what they do and deeply sorry that the allegations have for so long cast a shadow over their good work."

The trial of eight other ex-A4e defendants, who pleaded not guilty to all charges at Reading Crown Court, including conspiracy to cheat, is expected to start on October 6.

A further defendant, Nikki Foster, aged 30, of Reading, recruiter, was not at court on Monday. She is due to appear on Tuesday, February 11, over charges including fraud.

All defendants were unconditionally bailed. [Proceeding]

English plea over £20m maths scheme

A £20m scheme to offer graduate maths teachers incentives to work in the FE sector should be extended to English teachers, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) has said.

Skills Minister Matthew Hancock announced that graduate maths teachers will get a bonus of up to £10,000 if they choose to work in FE colleges. It is hoped the scheme will help recruit 500 new maths teachers.

Stewart Segal, AELP chief executive, welcomed the scheme, but added: "We would also like to see this scheme extended to the teaching of functional English as well which is just as important to those who lack the basic literacy skills."

Under the scheme, graduates who choose to teach in the sector will receive a bonus of £7,500, payable in their first year, and rising to £10,000 if they train to support learners with special educational needs.

Mr Hancock also announced that a scheme to give bursaries to trainee maths teachers, reported by *FE Week* last August, had been extended to the 2014/15 academic year.

The policy will also reward colleges with up to £20,000 if they recruit a specialist grade maths teacher, and £30,000 for those which share teaching expertise with other colleges and learning providers.

Loans process 'putting off learners'

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Fears have been raised that a lengthy application process for FE loans could be putting people off starting courses.

David Hughes (pictured top), chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (Niace), claimed there was a "worrying conversion rate" between the number of students offered 24+ advanced learning loans and those who took up the offer and started courses.

He told *FE Week* this could have been caused by slow processing of loans — an issue the Student Loans Company (SLC) said had "improved".

Mr Hughes pointed to government figures published last year that showed there had been 52,468 loan applications up to the end of October — of which 39,043 were ready for payment by that point.

But just 25,200 loans were taken out by the end of October, according to provisional figures from the latest Statistical First Release (SFR).

It indicated that only 65 per cent of potential learners offered loans had taken up the offer and started their courses by the end of October.

Mr Hughes said: "The longer loans take to be processed, the more likely people are to miss the start of their course or even change their mind over starting altogether."

"It is probably one of the reasons why there is a worrying conversion rate from those who have applied for loans and those taking up courses."

Meanwhile, the most recent figures from the

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) (published last month) showed 57,181 loan applications had been lodged by the end of December — of which 20 per cent were not ready for payment.

A spokesperson for the SLC claimed its processing rate had improved since the end of December — with 77.5 per cent of 61,935 loan applications received by February 2 being processed.

She said: "These figures demonstrate that SLC continues to efficiently process applications for funding."

"If a customer has been asked to provide evidence to support their application they are advised to send in their evidence as soon as possible to allow us to complete their application and prevent any delays."

Christine Doubleday (pictured centre), deputy executive director of the 157 Group, said: "The ongoing lag in the readiness of payments is clearly worrying."

"Concerns raised earlier in the year are not being rectified quickly enough."

"Behind the statistics lie significant numbers of people who are either unable to start their learning or trying to do so on very little money."

Shadow Skills Minister Liam Byrne (pictured right) said: "It is vital that people who miss out the first time [on education] get a chance to gain skills and qualifications."

"But the government is letting these people down. Ministers must tell us why these loan applications are not being dealt with quickly enough."

A spokesperson for BIS declined to comment.



Apprenticeship opportunities rise by 25 pc

Apprenticeship vacancies have increased by a quarter and applications are up 43 per cent, according to data released by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS).

The data shows that there were 37,410 apprenticeship vacancies advertised online between August and October last year, an increase of 24 per cent on the figure for the same period in 2012, which was 30,230.

It also shows that the number of online applications for apprenticeships increased by 43 per cent to 461,530.

NAS also said apprenticeship applications from women had increased by 55 per cent since 2012 — to 216,100 between August and October 2013. It means that 47 per cent of all applications for apprenticeships in 2013 were made by women.

Skills Minister Matthew Hancock said: "These figures show that apprenticeships are growing in appeal to young people, and yet more young women are seeking out this unique opportunity to earn while they learn and gain a recognised qualification while notching up vital work experience."

"But with each online position attracting an average of 12 applications, demand continues to outstrip supply and I would urge more employers to consider how they can take advantage of this available pool of talent and grow their business through apprenticeships."



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Editor's comment

Keep the flagship afloat

Traineeships should have no enemies and yet there's been much talk that they're simply not taking off.

To what extent this has been the case we can't say as traineeship data did not feature in the most recent statistical first release, despite promises it would be.

Regardless, it's been clear for some time that the problem has been benefits.

The programme is simply not attractive to learners who stand to lose their Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) — to take part in a scheme that more often than has no immediate financial benefit.

This has been brought home by the email to Job Centre Plus advisers, who are told to steer teenagers clear of traineeships while the wait for the promised JSA exemption for traineeships goes on.

Why isn't Nick Clegg stepping in and banging heads together? Isn't the DPM supposed to be sorting out youth unemployment schemes? We know that every day a young person is out of work the harder it will be for them to secure a job.

The FE sector is willing and able to make a success of traineeships, but unnecessary barriers outside of their control put the whole scheme at risk.

Removing these barriers is perhaps the only way to ensure it really is a flagship policy, as opposed to a sinking one.

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Hayes in FE 'comeback' after year out

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Former Skills Minister John Hayes has called for more to be done to improve careers advice for young people in what he jokingly called his "comeback" to FE.

Speaking on FE and skills for the first time since leaving the role, Mr Hayes said the sector had a lot to be proud of.

But, Mr Hayes, who is currently Minister Without Portfolio, said: "Whatever our achievements I don't claim we've got everything right yet."

He added: "I'm very proud that I established the first and long overdue National Careers Service.

"But I think there is more that we can do in that respect — we need to give careers education the priority it deserves."

In calling for improved careers guidance, Mr Hayes, who was at the NCFE Upskilling the Nation conference on Thursday, February 6, joins voices from across the sector including the Association of Colleges, which recently launched the Careers Guidance: Guaranteed campaign on the issue. Careers guidance in schools has also come under fire from Ofsted itself.

Mr Hayes, who served as Shadow Skills Minister between 2007 and 2010 and then Skills Minister from the 2010 General Election to September 2012 when he was succeeded by Matthew Hancock, further said the reforms to the school system under Education Secretary Michael Gove would have a positive impact on colleges.

"By reforming the school system way we will remove the need for the FE system to act as a remedial sector which compensates for the failures earlier on," he said.

"And that will change both the priorities and expectations of further education, the character and status of the sector."

He also spoke to FE Week about the Education and Training Foundation, an organisation which was first thought up as the FE Guild during his time as Skills Minister, but was brought to life under Mr Hancock.

Mr Hayes said: "I think the journey we travelled is a long one it's an ambitious set of objectives that we set out and I think we're on the road to achieving those ambitions.

"I remain committed to the idea that part of the solution to the problem of driving up standards is that you have to have a twofold approach, with employer involvement and

with an FE sector which has sufficient status to be regarded by employers as the right place to go to get what they need.

"For me the two things can only work when they happen in parallel... and I hope that's what we deliver over the course of this parliament."

He finished by saying that he was optimistic about the raised profile of the FE sector.

"When I first became the Shadow Minister, how often did you hear ministers talking about skills and apprenticeships as part of their routine political dialogue?" he said.

"Now, the Chancellor or the Prime Minister barely go a day or a week without mentioning skills, and they have listed apprenticeships as one of the core achievements of this government.

"When I first started talking about apprenticeships, I was regarded as a bit odd."

Referring to comments he had made as Skills Minister which portrayed FE as "the Cinderella sector" in comparison with schools and HE, he said: "There are clear signs that something I've always hoped for is starting to happen, FE and skills are no longer the Cinderella they were once described as."

Comments

Funding agency in danger of overload

I suspect the National Audit Office (NAO) would have similar findings if it turned its attention to the SFA, which is currently undergoing yet another restructure and downsizing as it absorbs the National Apprenticeship Service.

Let's hope the reported second NAO probe into the Department for Education looks at RPA and highlights the scandalous lack of IAG in schools about the apprenticeship/skills route.

Amanda Sayers

Concerns over nuclear college plans

I find it increasingly frustrating to hear ministers announce their proposals to introduce new learning provision to the market in order to meet future Skills requirements.

Recent announcements include the HS2 College of Further Education to train the rail engineers for the building of the HS2 line and now we have this announcement for a nuclear college.

We have, across the country, the necessary facilities and skills to provide the training for the future workforce and addressing any potential short fall in provision for these specific sectors would

surely be better funded (and more cost effective) in existing provision, procured through competitive tender.

Noel Johnson



@GrahamatSSC
Starting to feel like the start of a trend



@OldDitch
Wonder whether BIS were aware of what FE offers when they planned a new nuclear college ... I suspect not

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FE Week profile

Peter Marples ~ his story

@RebeccaKCooney
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The director and owner of Aspire Achieve Advance talks to FE Week

In early 2006 Peter Marples, fresh off the back of a merger between his provider Assa and training giant Carter & Carter, was vaunted in national press as “one of the least known and more powerful people in further education”.

When I tell him this, he laughs and describes it as “an inappropriate comment by an exuberant journalist”.

“It’s certainly not true now,” he says.

The claim may not be true, but current venture Aspire Achieve Advance certainly has some clout.

As of last month, it held subcontractor contracts worth £5.8m, according to the Skills Funding Agency, and works with around 1,500 apprentices.

However, one of Marples’s biggest regrets is the Assa deal (which he pitches more as a sale than a merger) despite the fact it resulted in his appointment to the role of business development director at Carter & Carter.

He had been managing director of Assa when the deal was struck in August 2005. The £24.2m Carter & Carter paid for Assa made Marples — who had led a management buyout of the transport, aerospace and food and drink industries provider just two years earlier — a multi-millionaire almost overnight.

But, he says: “I think the timing was not right to sell Assa at that point.

“I think the business could have gone on independently to probably have been now the biggest and best provider in the sector.”

He chose to go ahead with the deal partly, he says, because of a “genuine belief that being part of something bigger would have helped us grow faster”.

But Carter & Carter’s subsequent demise meant his dreams for Assa were not to be.

Carter & Carter had begun life in 1992 with a contract to improve the accident and repair division at the Vauxhall car firm. Five years later it moved into training, winning the British Audi Academy contract.

In 2005 Carter & Carter was floated on the stock market with an £80m valuation before Assa was acquired and by April 2007, Carter & Carter shares were trading hands for more than £12 each, valuing it at £550m-plus.

But the growth strategy came to an abrupt end with the tragic death of founder Phillip Carter, who died along with his 17-year-old son, Andrew, in a helicopter crash in May 2007.

Within eight months the 27,000-learner company was in administration with shares tumbling to 85p before they were suspended.

It was eventually bought out in the main by NCG (formerly Newcastle College Group). The deal was thought to have helped save the jobs of around 1,500 of Carter & Carter’s 2,200 staff.

“It was very difficult personally because I should have been with Phil in that helicopter — the company lost its charismatic leader,”

says Marples, who resigned following the tragedy.

He adds: “I had an allegiance to Phil and respected his vision and drive and I didn’t trust the vision and drive of those who replaced him.”

Despite this, he tells me he was “of course” surprised the company declined so rapidly. He is also defensive about the huge growth of Carter & Carter.

“It was part of a strategy that the board fully supported and that business would have continued to prosper with Phil at the helm,” he says, refuting any suggestion that the growth had made the company unstable.

“There isn’t a negative perception of so much growth at NCG or at Vision West Notts, or at Learndirect,” he adds, defiantly.

The attitude betrays “an entrepreneurial streak” that Marples, now 49, says first evidenced itself during his childhood in the village of Wirksworth, in the Derbyshire Peak District.

His mother and father, Jean and Walter, ran the local Post Office where Marples tells me he was bought up sitting on the counter, counting money from the age of three and his choice to go into accountancy was, he says, down to his mother.

“My mother said I was no good with my hands, so I was either going to be a bank manager or an accountant,” he says.

“There isn’t a negative perception of so much growth at NCG or at Vision West Notts, or at Learndirect”

Marples took on an accountancy apprenticeship at Derbyshire County Council at 16, before joining the Audit Commission in 1987 and then being “head-hunted” by consultancy firm KPMG in 1990.

After nearly 13 years he left to join Assa and then, helped by profits from the company’s sale to Carter & Carter and in true millionaire



Inset: Peter Marples with wife Sarah at a Radio 2 driving experience in aid of Children in Need



style, he led a consortium that bought Derby County Football Club in 2006. It was, he says, “probably the craziest thing I’ve done”.

“I felt I could run it like a business, and make it successful using business principles,” he says.

But he quickly found that running a football club was not like running a business.

“It’s one of those things that you get caught up in the emotion of buying your club you support, and when you get into it you realise it’s not quite what it seems,” he says.

Under Marples, the club made it to the Premier League, something he is evidently proud of, but in 2008 he decided to sell the club.

His next move was to set up Aspire Achieve Advance with former West Nottinghamshire College principal Di McEvoy-Robinson.

“I didn’t need to do it, but I’m very driven by trying to be successful at whatever I do — and apprenticeships are something that’s really important to me,” he says.

Though nowhere near as large as Carter & Carter, Aspire Achieve Advance has also grown quickly. In September 2012 it teamed up with City of Liverpool College to buy the “majority” of business from First4Skills — a provider behind around 10,000 apprenticeships across the country that had gone into administration.

But Marples insists there should be no concern about over-expansion.

“We spend a lot of time on the quality side and... talking to employers, learners and staff about how we can continuously improve that quality,” he says.

Marples, who is married to the Aspire Achieve Advance quality and compliance director Sarah and has two children, Thomas, aged 20, and Samantha, 23, is reticent about his life outside of work.

He seems to be someone who does not switch off easily, although he’s clearly committed to his charity work with Children in Need and Frazer’s House, which helps parents of children suffering with brain tumours.

“Being successful brings lots of different types of rewards,” he says.

“It’s not about writing cheques. Anyone can write a cheque and walk away. It’s about putting your energy and the skills you’ve got into those sorts of things.”

It’s a personal thing

What’s your favourite book?
Any autobiography or factual book. Selling the Invisible [a book on modern marketing by Harry Beckwith] is great

What’s your pet hate?
Envious people who could only do better if they worked harder

If you could invite anyone, living or dead, to a dinner party, who would it be?
Bill Clinton — not political, but I think he has charisma and would be great company

What do you do to switch off from work?
I love work so don’t really switch off as those close to me will testify. I just love to spend

time with my wife and family. I’m also into cars, and my wife is as well — it’s probably our hobby. That, and travelling. We like to see the world if we can, we spend a bit of time working with a couple of local charities, so we try and raise a lot of money for those charities, getting people involved and all of those things

What did you want to be when you grew up?
My mother always said I was no good with my hands and therefore would be a bank manager or accountant. I became an accountant, although don’t do much accounting now, thankfully

Looking at inspections from

It's one thing being inspected by Ofsted — and feeling aggrieved by the process or outcome — but it's another thing to be carrying out the inspection and potentially exposing managing directors and principals to the ugly truth about their organisations.

Here, just weeks after ex-Newcastle College Group chief executive Dame Jackie Fisher revealed why she had thrown Ofsted out mid-inspection back in 2012 (pictured inset), former inspector Phil Hatton speaks to *FE Week* about his experience from the other side of the fence.

The debate about complaints against Ofsted has prompted discussions about the current process in the sector.

Over the past year, since I gave up being a full-time inspector, I have worked with a wide selection of providers and colleges and have spoken with many more at conferences.

There is a very definite feeling among them that the appeals procedure is heavily loaded one way and that complaining about any aspect of inspection would be 'a waste of time'.

This is a sad reflection of how the inspection process is currently viewed by those subject to it.

'Iron Fist'

Of the four inspectorates I worked for in 20 years as an inspector, the one that was probably viewed best by the sector was the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI).

Before being merged into Ofsted, an independent review of inspectorates described the ALI as being viewed by the sector as 'an iron fist in a velvet glove'.

Communication with the sector was particularly strong, with the monthly newsletter, *Talisman*, being eagerly read.

Full-time inspectors met to share findings frequently and part-time inspectors worked for the inspectorate rather than a third party, with their performance and development being closely monitored.

Part of the quality assurance of complaints in the ALI was for myself and another inspector to review and analyse the reasons for all the complaints that arose in a particular year.

Over the two years I did this it was extremely rare for any to get to the stage of judicial review.

The ALI, just like any really good provider, learned from what had gone wrong to prevent reoccurrence.

That should be the *raison d'être* for any complaints system if the culture of an organisation is really about improvement, rather than paying it lip service.

Communication breakdown

One of the forgotten quality assurance methods when I was a part-time inspector for the Further Education Funding Council was for college nominees to be able to sit in on observations with inspectors.

This meant that nominees developed confidence in judgements made about teaching and learning, with real transparency of the process as viewed by colleges at the time.

In my experience complaints arise when there are breakdowns in communication.

As a lead inspector, both you and the provider nominee want to ensure that an inspection runs smoothly, so that your team of inspectors get to see every positive attribute of the provider.

This was always my very clear message when first talking to a provider, 'show us everything that you do well' before we reach the grading meeting.

My experienced colleagues that I have worked with over the years have that same attitude, so that if there is a close call between two grades we would be questioning to see if there were any positives that had been missed or which had not been given sufficient weighting.

Conflict

The role of the nominee is absolutely crucial in preventing potential conflict.

Any provider, whether one with 20 or 40,000 learners, needs to ensure that communication during inspection throws up that potential conflict quickly.

Over the years I have had to deal with inspectors whose personality was such that they came across as too cold and unfriendly, or whose grasp of the area they were inspecting was just not good enough.

Along with this, there were occasionally those who were of the glass being half-empty rather than half-full variety.

In such cases the lead inspector or their assist would usually observe the inspector where such concerns were raised, and look at their evidence base to check the validity of judgements and the understanding of what was being observed or spoken about.

This usually worked very well, with feedback to the inspector ironing out the difficulties. In such cases, with honest two-way communication with the nominee, the outcome of inspection was not impacted on.

Where there are unresolved problems it is usually down to clashes of personality. That can be a two-way street, with elements of blame on both sides.

Intimidation

Speaking with total frankness and honesty, there are some providers (or usually a particular individual) whose point-blank refusal to understand why they are less than perfect cannot be shaken, despite the evidence being irrefutable as to why they are not.

Truly outstanding providers will say 'but is there anything else that we could improve?'

“I have personally to intimidation on occasions”

— Former Ofsted inspector



I have personally been subjected to intimidation on a number of occasions. In one particular case an external observer on the inspection wondered why there was no punitive action for a provider who tried to make the inspection very difficult to carry out.

The complaints process was crystal clear to all in the ALI and any action that was needed was rapidly taken.

An inspection manager, unconnected with the problematic inspection and knowledgeable about the area being inspected, would quickly visit a complaining provider to hear their side of the story, alongside reviewing the complete evidence base for the inspection. This worked well in the vast majority of cases, with a two-way

dialogue. Providers felt listened to and that the complaints process was transparent and fair.

The timings of the current Ofsted complaints system need to be aligned with the report publication schedule (five weeks to publish, six to deal with complaints?).

The fact it exceeds the publication schedule sends the wrong message and does not demonstrate joined up thinking if you are really wanting to engage positively with the sector, rather than to give the impression of a hard-nosed 'publish or be damned' organisation.

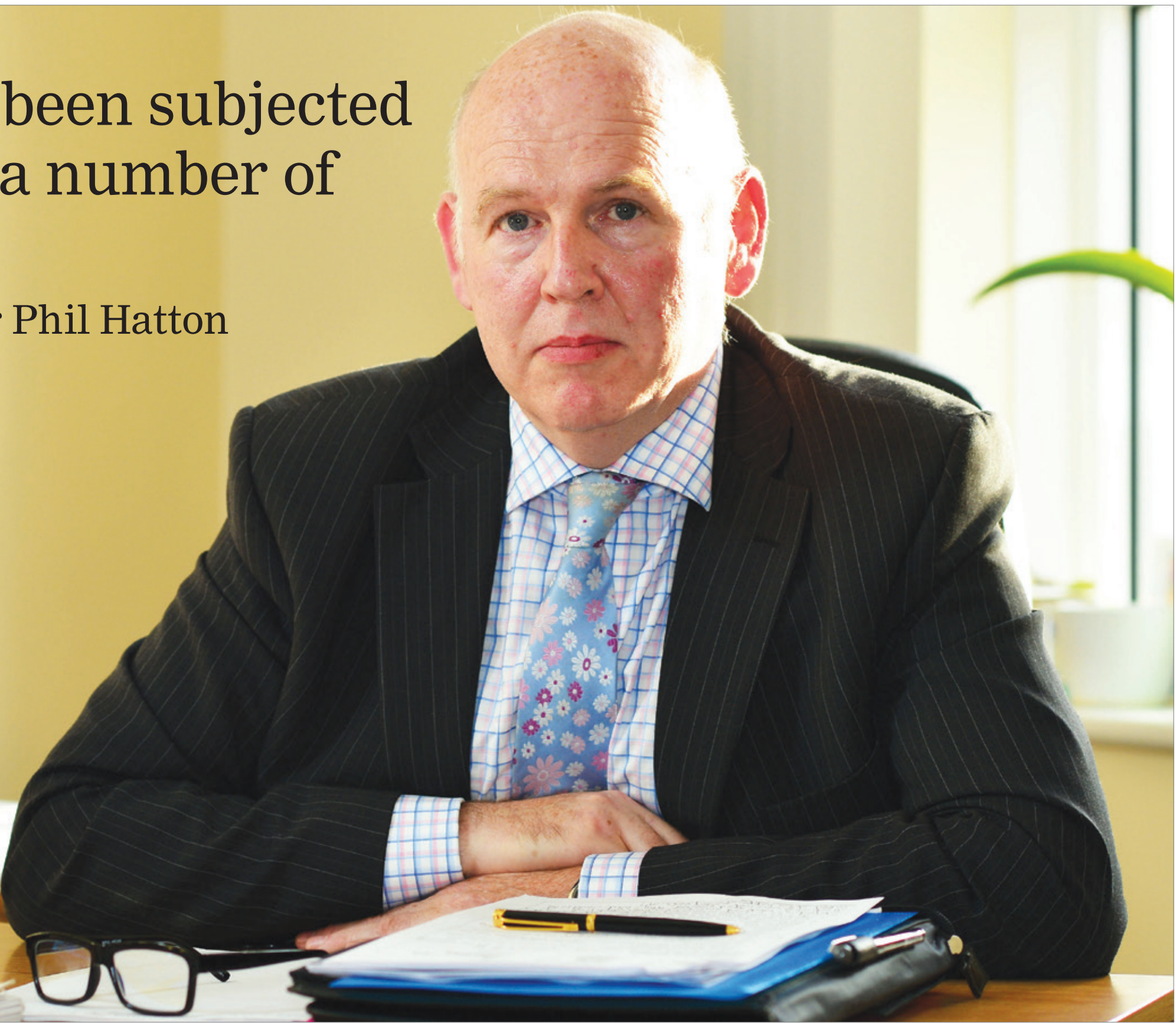
Mistakes

It is an obvious fact that anyone can make a mistake. An acknowledgement of this when

the ‘other side of the fence’

been subjected
a number of

Phil Hatton



one is made would prevent some complaints reaching the latter stages.

Communication will most likely be good when inspectors know the areas that they are inspecting well and they can demonstrate a record of high achievement in them to those that they are inspecting. This cuts out the ‘who are you to be telling me what to do’ element of potential conflict.

By the end of August a record year for the number of Learning and Skills inspections carried out will have ended, many led by recently-recruited inspectors.

The Freedom of Information request by *FE Week* does point to failings in the process of inspection in the last academic year, with nine step two complaints by providers being upheld (over one-third of those reached).

What is even more worrying is the 100 per cent rate quoted so far for this academic year, with all four complaints having been upheld.

Hopefully, the need to ramp up quality assurance of inspections in the field will be recognised and will impact quickly to prevent mistrust. I know that inspection can be a truly valuable improvement process for the sector. ■

Phil Hatton is a former HMI with 20 years’ experience, leading hundreds of college and work-based learning inspections. He now works as an adviser at the Learning Improvement

Complaints procedure defended by Ofsted director

Ofsted director of FE & skills Matthew Coffey (pictured) has defended the education watchdog’s complaints process.

He told *FE Week*: “The number of complaints made to Ofsted are relatively consistent year-on-year and it relates to a very small percentage of inspections. If people feel aggrieved from their inspection they absolutely have every right to complain and they absolutely should complain.

“Statistics will tell you that we’ve upheld complaints. I know of a good number where grades have been amended

because we’ve had a second look and a much more detailed examination, and equally I am aware where complaints have been made and they haven’t been upheld after the same process.

“It’s a costly exercise but it’s absolutely right that anybody subject to the scrutiny of a public body has the opportunity to appeal.

“Also, let’s not forget that in FE and skills inspections we identify a member of the provider’s senior team as a nominee who takes part in all the discussion we have — so all our judgments are made in full view of the provider. There’s no closed door.”



FE Week experts

Building a skilled construction workforce between the gaps

While the building trade is a big employer of apprentices, the wider construction industry suffers skills gaps elsewhere. But Laing O'Rourke has teamed up with FE and skills bodies, including a number of colleges, to boost the development of industry-needed skills, explains Alison Lamplough.

The construction industry is a major UK employer and, as well as being one of our essential sectors, it has also been a major exporter for nearly a century.

Yet the industry is facing up to a ticking time bomb — caused by a skills shortage and an ageing workforce.

Apprenticeships have long played a part in the building sector of the construction industry.

But on the civil engineering side, the demand and attractiveness of formal apprenticeships has not been strong.

“Unless the skills gap in the workforce is addressed, UK contractors will have to look to Europe to meet the skill requirements”

Coupling this with the demographic timebomb of an aging workforce means unless urgent action is taken, the problem of a skills gap is about to hit home.

It is anticipated that over the next decade the UK will see an increase in investment in major civil engineering infrastructure development.

Projects such as Crossrail have already shown we have skill gaps in areas such as tunnelling and civil engineering specific trades.

Unless the skills gap in the workforce is addressed, UK contractors will have to look to Europe to meet the skill requirements.

In the past, the industry has used major projects such as Terminal 5 at Heathrow and the London Olympics as catalysts for improving skills.

Laing O'Rourke, as a direct employer, is fully aware of these skill gaps.

Last year, the company won funding from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, under the Employer Ownership Pilot, to develop a new level two apprenticeship for steelfixing — identified nationally as one of the gaps in core skills.

Laing O'Rourke selected a group of colleges to deliver the formal training component. These were Bridgwater College, Gateshead College and the National Construction College.

After a full tendering process the company appointed awarding organisation



NOCN to support the development of the qualification. Its managing director, Graham Hasting-Evans, is on the UK National Steering Committee for the Build Up Skills programme, a UK initiative backed by the European Commission which aims to support closing the training and skills gap in the UK workforce to enable it to meet the EU 2020 energy efficiency targets.

In February 2013, at NOCN's offices in London, Laing O'Rourke brought together a team to develop both the qualification and how the apprenticeship would be delivered.

The development also included input from operational staff, Laing O'Rourke's suppliers and BAM Nuttall as a representative of other major contractors.

The team defined the employers' standards, the quality control requirements, the knowledge qualification, workplace learning (NVQ), the approach to up-skilling, the training exercises and delivery of the apprenticeship.

The process was undertaken in line with the Richard Review principles.

A full package has been brought together including Functional Skills, ERR and trainee/pre-apprenticeships pathways at entry and level one. A level three is planned for team leaders in order to give a full pathway. The local enterprise partnership and local agencies are involved in recruiting potential apprentices and the apprenticeship has been approved by Ofqual and is on the Apprenticeship Framework.

The initial trainee programme has started and the first cohort of apprentices is planned to begin the level two apprenticeship in March.

A quality control group with the employers will oversee the new style apprenticeships.

The qualification has been designed in such a way as to also provide a framework for up-skilling the existing workforce and introduce the use of new technology into site based work.

Bringing everyone together in this way is an innovative approach to the development of employer-led apprenticeships and qualifications. All involved have enjoyed this collaborative approach and see this as an excellent way of working. It's the way of the future for employer-led apprenticeships and qualifications.

Alison Lamplough, head of operational training, Laing O'Rourke

Are rural business communities being let down in the training stakes?

Employers in big town and city locations make an attractive proposition for young workers and providers who, claims Salena Dawson, are becoming less interested in rural provision. She looks at whether such communities are being let down by businesses and providers.

I am a small business owner in a rural Norfolk market town. I am passionate about my community and, like many small independent business owners, I want to be integral to its continued existence.

Unfortunately, we the community (both business and residential) do not seem to be inspiring our young people to stay local.

Losing our young people or failing to attract younger people into our market town will have a detrimental effect on the prosperity and sustainability of our community and in the long term the loss of young people will impact the economic viability of local businesses like mine.

Like many market towns we have seen an expansion in population, but mainly on the outskirts of town.

This makes the accessibility to the nearest city shopping mall a better shopping experience than our high street with its many vacant retail units, or occupied shops — none of which sell young people's clothes, shoes or jewellery.

We have no cinema, public swimming pool, bars or anything remotely extreme sport-orientated to entice our young people to remain local.

Quaint we are, cosmopolitan we are not.

We have an academy, but with no sixth form college. Those lucky enough to make the GCSE grade are shipped out to a shiny new world spending their pounds elsewhere.

Those not wanting FE are left often to find their own way — NEET [not in education, employment or training]. Aspiration in these young people remains low.

However, what we do have locally is around 1,000 small independent businesses, all with potential employers who could give work experience, employment, and mentoring to our younger people.

But we don't.

I have sat on the local chamber, been a member of the local partnership and even sat as an independent governor at the local school.

But more and more I become frustrated at the lack of communication between these groups to act to assist young people into local business. Instead we leave our young people to simply leave.

With the growth in apprenticeship schemes we would expect better communication by commercially-minded providers, but it beggars belief that small businesses in market towns seem to be invisible providers.

We small business owners find it onerous and time-consuming to proactively seek the right candidate.

There is a plethora of providers and the information at times is overwhelming.

Further time is wasted by mismatched candidates being sent for interviews because the



provider is trying to pigeonhole candidates into unsuitable placements or into careers the candidates do not want.

Is it any wonder that small businesses give up trying to access the apprenticeship scheme as a viable way employing young people?

“It beggars belief that small businesses in market towns seem to be invisible providers”

So how do we keep our young people local? We create an educational environment which sustains young people locally beyond the age of 16.

We provide better communication between schools and the business community by appointing a local business leader to be the conduit between the two. We start giving impartial careers advice.

We start making apprenticeship providers more accountable — it's time for them to not only make the quick easy placements to large business, but also to take the time to know local business and match the candidate accordingly.

Without retaining young people locally our community dies. It is incumbent on us in business to seek to retain skills locally and to create an environment where young people want to remain. To survive we need to pocket their pound too.

I remain passionate about my community and I hope to be integral in providing an environment which nurtures young people to one day feel this passion about their community also.

Salena Dawson, solicitor, Dawsons Law, Watton, Norfolk

Skill shortages may not be what they seem

The employer skills survey pointed out, in general, how skills shortages were threatening to undermine any economic recovery. Mick Fletcher takes a closer, critical look at the survey.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) has been sensibly even-handed with its National Employer Skills Survey (NESS), simultaneously urging employers to raise their ambitions and FE colleges to do more to place themselves at the cutting edge of training.

What has been missing from the commentary is any serious interrogation of the report and its assumptions.

It's as though the evident reliability of the data has blinded users to some serious questions that might be raised about its validity.

It may, of course, just be that a narrative about the need for more training is convenient for almost all stakeholders, and no-one wants to rock the boat.

The reliability of evidence relates to whether or not the results might have occurred by chance.

Although it is based on interviewing a sample of employers, NESS is based on more than 90,000 interviews with a carefully-constructed cross section of establishments.

If it were to be repeated it is highly likely that it would produce a similar set of results, as is illustrated by the stability of the time series data.

The validity of evidence, however, is the extent to which it measures what you think it is measuring.

It's not a question of how many people you ask, but whether their answers mean what you think they do.

“It's a fragile basis for drawing far-reaching conclusions”

The concept of 'skill shortage' on which so much of the report's analysis rests, is one that requires much further scrutiny.

Contrary to much of the commentary, employers cannot 'report' a skill shortage.

They can report a vacancy and they can give their ideas as to why that vacancy has not been filled.

One reason given might be the lack of applicants with suitable skills (NESS wisely probes with an open-ended question).



This, however, is not the same as evidence that there are no potential applicants with suitable skills out there, which is what you might think a skills shortage means.

It could be that no-one with the right skills was prepared to work at the rate offered, it could be that the workplace was in the middle of nowhere with poor transport links or that the employer used a poor recruitment strategy.

It's a fragile basis for drawing far-reaching conclusions about the need to alter the balance of college programmes or the careers advice given to young people.

The report defines skill shortages as

“vacancies which are proving difficult to fill due to the establishment not being able to find applicants with the appropriate skills, qualifications or experience”.

It then presents the apparently worrying fact that more than a fifth (22 per cent) of all vacancies and 30 per cent of those that are hard to fill are caused by skill shortages. But turn this around.

The same figure means that 70 per cent of hard to fill vacancies have applicants with the appropriate skills, qualifications and experience.

Maybe they don't want the job. Maybe the employer has a valid reason for not wanting a well-qualified applicant.

Whichever it is, increasing skills supply does not appear to be the appropriate response to the issue, and lack of skills may not be the main thing that is holding back the economy.

There is, of course, another simpler way of analysing skill shortages. One can look at wage rates.

Economics does not explain everything, but in a well-functioning market if a particular skill is in short supply employers will bid up wages.

It happened a few years ago with plumbers and maths skills always earn a premium.

The best way to align education with the needs of the labour market is to give clear and unbiased information on the opportunities, including wages, offered in different occupations and let the opportunities for training be driven by the resulting choices.

Mick Fletcher is an FE Consultant

A plea for cuts caution after unannounced qualifications cull

Vocational education seems to be viewed as a soft option for public funding cuts, but it's a view that has far-reaching consequences for the economy, says Kirstie Donnelly.

There's a theme emerging around a lot of the policy changes in the FE sector of late — cuts.

First, there was the announcement of a 17.5 per cent funding rate cut for 18-year-olds, described by Education Secretary Michael Gove as the 'least detrimental' scenario. But for who? Certainly not young adults, who see vocational qualifications as a way of getting on the skills and employment ladder.

Then, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) announced plans to cut funding for almost 1,500 qualifications that fall below the 15-credit threshold.

We weren't all aware the threshold had increased from 12 to 15 credits, but for the most part we were prepared for something — we just didn't know the full extent of it, or how it might impact on all would-be vocational learners.

While there is logic in de-cluttering the system — something we welcomed from the Whitehead review — this goes too far.

It looks like random cuts are being made to compensate for a funding hole elsewhere, and sadly the adult vocational market is not seen as a priority, but rather an easy target.

This latest announcement is cutting funding for the sake of it without considering the wider, longer-term impact of the changes.

We know youth unemployment remains



high, stubbornly so.

We also know that employers are facing skills gaps in certain industries, which could destabilise the UK's economic recovery.

And yet we've surely all seen research detailing employers' fears that young people aren't prepared for the workplace.

To me, vocational qualifications are the solution. They give people the chance to develop the skills and confidence they need for the workplace.

They enable future progression or specialism within an industry. Ultimately,

they bridge the gap between education and employment.

The government needs to think carefully about any further changes it makes to the system — particularly when it comes to funding cuts.

First and foremost, employers and their needs must be the focus of any changes and developments. After all, they're the ones who hire people in the first place. But I doubt they have been consulted.

“Don't just cut back and 'cleanse the system' without considering all the evidence and all the facts. Don't make any more snap decisions”

Some of the qualifications that will cease to receive funding on the back of the SFA announcement may indeed have less value to employers.

But equally, we can't assume that just because a qualification is niche to a certain industry, or has limited take-up, that it is worthless. In fact it could be the complete opposite.

We also need to consider how different sectors operate. Some require more specific or atomised learning. This blanket approach cannot work for all industries.

Employers aside, we mustn't forget the impact on the learners themselves, particularly adult learners or the long-term unemployed. Or even the likes of ex-service personnel or those leaving prison.

Many won't have the skills or confidence to jump straight into a long-term programme of study. Shorter courses can help them to learn the ropes and act as a stepping-stone onto further learning.

And what about those already in work who want to enhance their skills further? Does the government realise it could be denying them the opportunity to further their careers? This surely this goes against everything vocational education and training stands for.

I urge the government, the SFA and others to proceed with caution. Don't just cut back and 'cleanse the system' without considering all the evidence and all the facts. Don't make any more snap decisions. Think about the future impact this will have on the economy. Think about the individuals this will affect.

Vocational pathways can and do deliver quality results. It's about time this country recognises that, instead of treating them as the poor relation that can be cast aside whenever the purse strings are tightened.

Kirstie Donnelly, UK managing director, City & Guilds

FE Week campus round-up

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From left: Student Harry Benney, aged 17, shepherd John Garrett and student Tom Van Oppen, 17, with a newborn lamb

Visitors can hardly baa-lieve their eyes as newborn lambs delivered

Visitors to Sparsholt College could have been forgiven for thinking spring had arrived early as they watched agricultural students helping to deliver dozens of new-born lambs.

Members of the public weren't sheepish as they were welcomed into the Hampshire-based college's lamb baa-rn during an open weekend.

College shepherd John Garrett provided a running commentary as a group of eight

students delivered 33 lambs under his guidance.

Philip Holroyd-Smith, who organised the event, said: "I can't imagine there are many opportunities for people to get so close to a new born lamb and to witness one being born is pretty special.

"There were a number of occasions when visitors let out a collective 'aaah' as they saw a new lamb arrive in the world."

Royal seal of approval from Duke of York



Construction student Matthew Greaves, aged 16, with Prince Andrew and Nick Hand, head of construction. Inset: Lord Baker with Mr Hand and construction student Sandro Ferreira, 14

Buckinghamshire University Technical College (UTC) got the royal seal of approval when it was visited by The Duke of York.

Andrew was at the UTC's official opening ceremony with former education secretary Lord Baker, who is chair of the UTC brand.

Andrew spent time with information technology and construction students who showed him a new computer game they had created and their bricklaying skills.

He said: "Having listened to the students today, I can see that they have clearly

grasped the the purpose of the UTC which I believe they will make a significant difference both to their own futures and their community."

The UTC, which specialises in IT and construction, cost £10m to build and opened to students last September.

It currently has 100 students, but still has the capacity for another 400.

Going back in time for hair and beauty inspiration



Hair and beauty students from South Cheshire College proved they can cut it under pressure by creating striking new 1950s and music-inspired looks for a competition.

The college challenged its level three hairdressing students to come up with hairstyles based on famous songs from the charts, musicals, or films, with Paige O'Neill, aged 17, and Anna Mekelova, 36, sharing first place for their styles influenced by Disney musical film Tangled and Abba hit Dancing Queen.

Samantha Dugdale, 18, won a category for make-up artistry level three students. She transformed models' faces following a 1950s theme. Tracy Dony, hair and beauty technician at South Cheshire college, said: "The competition was a fantastic opportunity for students to demonstrate their skills.

"It also gave them all some useful experience of working under pressure."

Ellie Robertson, aged 18, modelling A hairstyle created by Anna Mekelova, which was inspired by Abba song Dancing Queen



Artist Serena de la Hey with, from left, students Amber Few-Hastie, aged 19, Katy Fox, 18, and Jamie-Leigh Winrow, 17 Inset: The Willow Man sculpture Pic: Emma Patterson

Shaping-up for workshop with willow sculptor

Art and design students from Yeovil College feel inspired about the shape of things to come after a workshop with famous sculptor Serena de la Hey.

Ms de la Hey, who created the iconic Willow Man sculpture next to the M5, near Bridgwater, in Somerset, worked with students from the college studying for level three BTec extended diplomas in art and design.

She answered questions about creating artwork from willow and showed how to cut

and manipulate it for sculptures. The artist also helped learners develop ideas for their next sculpture project, which will feature a model bird in a cage made from willow.

Student Katy Fox said: "It was really nice to work with something natural, rather than paint."

The Willow Man, which was unveiled in 2000, is 40ft tall and has a 16ft arm span. It is made of willow woven over a three-tonne steel frame.



Send your stories with pictures to campus@feweek.co.uk including names, ages and course of students where applicable

Touring with Warwick Davis — talented Francesca has joined film star’s new theatre company for short actors

Performing arts student Francesca Mills is determined that her 4ft frame should not stop her achieving big things on stage and on screen. She hopes a 12-week tour with a theatre company for short actors, led by movie star Warwick Davis, boost her career, writes Paul Offord.

Talented teenager Francesca Mills is worried that at 4ft tall she will find it harder than most of her classmates to get ahead in the acting world.

But the 17-year-old, who will complete a BTec extended diploma in performing arts in June, has been signed up by Britain’s most successful short actor, Warwick Davis.

The star of classic films such as Willow and Star Wars (in which he featured as an ewok, pictured), who recently appeared with comedian Ricky Gervais in BBC show Life’s Too Short, has launched The Reduced Height Theatre Company — and cast Francesca in its first play.

Francesca, who attends the Staffordshire-based Academy for Theatre Arts (which is jointly run by The Jill Clewes Academy and Newcastle-under-Lyme College), will play the maid in See How they Run, a farce written by Philip King set in Britain during the second world war.

Francesca said: “Short people get a bit type-cast, which means we often don’t get lead parts.

“We will play all the parts in



this play and the entire set, including the furniture, will be made smaller — so there will be no laughs to be gained from seeing us have to climb up things.

“The original script made no mention of short people and it hasn’t been changed for this production, so the idea is people will forget about our height and just become absorbed in the performance.”

She added: “I would like to follow Warwick into films one day, but I’m only young so I’m going to concentrate on my studies for the time being then see where my career takes me.”

Francesca and the rest of the cast have been rehearsing for two weeks and they will set-off on a 12-week national tour on February 19.

She also recently appeared on ITV show This Morning, alongside Mr Davis, to promote the play.

Mr Davis said: “Fran is absolutely brilliant as the maid. Watching her rehearse has made me think that I’m going to have to up my game.

“As a performer, she really sums up the ethos behind the project — to give a platform to the talented individuals there are within the short actor community and allow them to shine.”

Francesca sat most of her final BTec exams five months early, in January this year, to give her time to rehearse and tour.

Karen Dobson, principal at Newcastle-under-Lyme College, said: “We’re all extremely proud of Francesca. I have no doubt that she will go on to have a long and successful career.”



From left: Reduced Height Theatre Company cast members Jon Key, Warwick Davis and Francesca Mills checking out the script for play See How They Run. Inset left: See How They Run cast members Phil Holden, Jon Key, Rachel Denning, Warwick Davis, Francesca Mills, Peter Bonner and Ray Griffiths. Inset left: Mr Davis on the set of Willow

MOVERS & SHAKERS

Your weekly guide to who’s new and who’s leaving

A magistrate football fan and chartered surveyor has been announced as the new governors’ chair at Guildford College Group.

John Denning (pictured left) has been elected to the post and will take over from Stephen Caswell at the end of his term next month.

Mr Denning has been a college governor since March 2013 and is an experienced non-executive with local community and business knowledge.

He is an 11 years’ retired chartered surveyor, but continues to play an active part in business.

He was previously managing director of Bass Leisure Retail and chief executive of the Voyager Pub Company, but is currently senior independent director and deputy



chairman of the Royal Surrey County Hospital, and chair of the Retirement Lease Housing Association, based in Aldershot, Grandfather-of-five Mr Denning is also a magistrate on the North Hampshire Bench, a board trustee of the Queen Elizabeth Foundation for Disabled People, based in Leatherhead, and a director of Aldershot Town Football Club.

Stephen Caswell (pictured right), who has been chair of the Guildford College Group for the past six years, said: “I am confident that when I step down in March I will be leaving the college in John’s very capable hands to build on our successes and continue the journey begun by the board

and our new principal, Mike Potter.”

The Guildford College Group includes Guildford College, Merrist Wood College and Farnham Sixth Form College.

Mr Potter CBE, principal and chief executive of the Guildford College Group, said: “The governors have set the college a medium term target of getting the college to outstanding, not only in Ofsted terms but also as an integral part of the communities which it serves.

“A lot of the groundwork has been undertaken but work still remains to be done. This seamless transition from Stephen to John will help us continue our journey towards this destination and the whole college and I would like to pay a special thank you to Stephen for his huge

commitment and support over the past eight years”.

Mr Denning said: “I believe that with Mike at the helm, we have the capability of achieving our strategic objectives.

“The most important fundamental relationship in any successful organisation is that between the chief executive and chair, providing purpose and leadership.

“My main contribution will be to provide support and encouragement to Mike and his team for the benefit of our students.

“We will create a drive towards a greater sense of urgency and accountability through every level at the college, while preserving the values that have brought Stephen and the board success to date.”



Jobs



Director of Learning for Creative and Performing Arts, Hair and Beauty plus to lead on Higher Education (HE) – Stamford, Lincolnshire

Closing Date: February 16, 2014

New College Stamford has a vacancy for a Director of Learning. This is an exciting opportunity for a forward thinking and innovative professional that has the ability to generate a clear and concise vision for a range of curriculum areas and be able to work with others to develop and communicate this vision.

With a strong background of leading and managing teams through innovative and complex change, the Director of Learning will be a valued member of the Management Team and will have the opportunity to positively influence and improve the quality of teaching within the Directorate by working with teams to implement change and improve the learning experience for students.

For full details, and to apply, please go to www.stamford.ac.uk/jobs



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Nine thousand students. Three FE college locations. An academy, a UTC and a reputation for outstanding delivery: the Lincoln College Group has every reason to be proud. We're keen to build on our achievements by appointing a Chief Executive with clear ambitious vision.

With a strong commitment to delivering excellence and improving the life chances of young people through education, we want to expand our reach and assure continuing success, financial viability and commercial focus in a changing educational landscape.

The Board wishes to appoint a Chief Executive who can develop a shared vision and strategy to deliver sustainable growth and further expansion, diversification and development. The right candidate will bring about change; balance business risk and commercial growth; develop business principles in an educational community; and retain its integrity and moral purpose.

To be considered, you must be a capable ambassador for the College as we'll look to you to network at all levels, including nationally, with regulators and central government. We'll also expect you to have experience of business, industry, leadership and commercial growth, plus the ability to transfer this knowledge to the educational field. Your ability to balance leadership experience with the right values for educational outcomes will be a significant factor in your success.

For more information and how to apply, please visit
www.lincolncollegechiefexec.co.uk

If you would like to have a confidential discussion about this role and for any questions about the recruitment process please contact our retained consultants at Penna Executive Search: Maggie Hennessy on 07949 948092 or Julie Towers on 07764 791736.

Closing date: 17 February 2014.



Penna



SCAE Education Manager

Remuneration: Commensurate with Experience
Location: Office in Chelmsford but could commute from anywhere in UK

The Speciality Coffee Association of Europe (SCAE) is a trade and consumer association for members, being companies and individuals working in the field of speciality coffee production, preparation and delivery. With members in more than 70 countries around the world who network through SCAE events and online, SCAE has national chapters in 35 countries, meeting the needs of members, working within their own national coffee traditions.

OUR VISION: We are the authority on delivering coffee excellence.

OUR MISSION: To create and inspire excellence in the coffee community through innovation, research, education and communication.

The SCAE Education Manager is a new position. Responsible for brand integrity, strategic advancement and global promotion of SCAE's Coffee Diploma System (CDS), the successful candidate will be progressive, possesses excellent communication skills, be proficient in product management and distribution of educational content and experienced in working with a third party accredited product.

Priorities of this role include leading a team to achieve targeted sales, introducing an elearning programme, achieving world recognised accreditation for CDS and driving an audit initiative to ensure security and integrity of our education programme.

The Coffee Diploma System is a controlled and managed education curriculum, delivered through SCAE's Authorised Trainer network, which is a collective of over 300 certified distribution partners.

**To apply, please email david.veal@scae.com
Closing Date: 28th February**

www.scae.com



Somerset College

Curriculum Area Manager - Maths and English

£37,979 per annum
Full-time, permanent, 37 hours per week
Based Taunton, Somerset

This critical post will oversee the delivery and development of a wide range of Maths & English qualifications in an innovative and engaging manner, ensuring the successful participation of all key stakeholders, including 14-16 year old students, full-time 16-18 and 19+ students on study programmes, part-time adults, and apprentices.

The post will have a significant impact on the future direction of the Maths & English curriculum within Somerset College and will demonstrate a commitment to ensuring the delivery of these subject areas is of the highest standard across all programmes, as well as playing a key role in developing, training and equipping teachers to deliver existing and planned new provision.

For an application pack, please visit our website:
www.somerset.ac.uk or contact Human Resources on 01823 366 457 or email recruitment@somerset.ac.uk

For further information about the role please contact David Francis, Curriculum Director, on 01823 366410.

Applications can only be considered when submitted on a Somerset College application form.

Closing date: Midday, Friday 14 February 2014

Any person offered a position will be required to complete an enhanced DBS and, if appropriate, barred list check. Somerset College and The Work Academy are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

Somerset College and The Work Academy are committed to promoting Equality & Diversity. We respect the dignity and worth of each individual.

www.somerset.ac.uk



Somerset College

An exceptional opportunity for an outstanding individual....

Group Chief Executive: the Bradford College Group

Attractive salary (£160k) and benefits

The Context

The Bradford College Group has clear rationale and ambition, underwriting a Vision of coherent educational provision across Bradford, its region and beyond. The Group provides transformative solutions to education and training needs, encompassing a range of provision from 14-19 through to higher education. Built on the success of Bradford College, the Group consists of Bradford College, a Training Company, Academies, a Studio School, a Film School and Recruitment and Commercial Ventures. In total, there are 21,000 students, 1,750 staff and a gross turnover of c.£60m.

The Role

The new CEO will balance continuity and development; sustaining success across different domains and in a shifting policy context. Excellence will be the required standard across all activities. The Group is seeking keenly the award of Taught Degree Awarding Powers, appropriate to an organisation with the largest HE portfolio in the college sector.

The Group expects innovation and entrepreneurialism in key domestic and international markets, leading to significant income increases. New levels of efficiency and effectiveness will be essential.

Our CEO will work closely with a fully-engaged Corporation, leading and developing the Executive Team and reaching out convincingly to all staff across the Group.

The Person

We are open-minded about the background of candidates, although requiring successful experience in areas related to the Group's core activities and future development. We will insist on the ability to add value and take the Group in new directions and an uncompromising attitude towards performance. Successful management of institutional change will be fundamental.

An accomplished communicator and ambassador for the Group, the CEO will be comfortable across all external contexts, will inspire and motivate all staff and have full understanding of contemporary and future student expectations.

The Candidate Pack can be accessed at www.bradfordcollege.ac.uk Informal discussion with the Group's advisor, Professor Bill Wardle, is encouraged and can be arranged by calling 07777 642100 or via bill@billwardle.com

Closing date: Midday on Monday, 3 March 2014.

First stage interviews with the Selection Committee will take place on 14 March with second and final stage interviews on 20 March 2014.

We are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of young people and vulnerable adults and expect staff and volunteers to share this commitment.





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FE Week Sudoku challenge

		3		1		2		
		5	2	4				3
			6				1	
	6		5	2		8		
	3	9				7	4	
		2		3	4		5	
	4				5			
9				8	2	1		
		1		7		5		

Difficulty:
EASY

How to play:
Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

Solutions:
Next week

	3	4			5	2		
				1	8			4
8								3
4	1			5				
	5		1		6		4	
				9			5	2
7								9
5			2	8				
		2	6			3	8	

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Last Week's solutions

9	1	5	3	4	2	7	8	6
3	6	2	9	7	8	5	4	1
4	7	8	6	1	5	2	9	3
8	9	6	2	3	4	1	7	5
1	5	4	7	6	9	8	3	2
2	3	7	8	5	1	9	6	4
5	8	1	4	9	6	3	2	7
7	4	9	5	2	3	6	1	8
6	2	3	1	8	7	4	5	9

Difficulty:
EASY

2	8	7	1	6	5	9	4	3
9	1	5	8	3	4	6	7	2
6	4	3	9	2	7	5	8	1
1	7	8	3	9	6	2	5	4
4	2	6	5	8	1	7	3	9
5	3	9	7	4	2	1	6	8
3	5	2	6	1	8	4	9	7
7	9	4	2	5	3	8	1	6
8	6	1	4	7	9	3	2	5

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Spot the difference to WIN an FE Week mug!



Spot five differences. First correct entry wins an FE Week mug. Text your name and picture of your completed spot the difference to 07969 166 374.

Last week's Spot the Difference winner was Joe Simpkin, information systems team leader at Bedford College.